

A
S E R M O N /3.

PREACHED AT
SAINT EDMUND'S BURY,
FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE
SUNDAY-SCHOOLS
IN THAT TOWN,

On SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1787.

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AND PREACHER OF SAINT MARY'S, BURY.

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OF STUND
IN THOMAS KNOWLES D.D.

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THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME

ISAIAH, Chap. LVIII. Ver. XIII, XIV.

IF THOU TURN AWAY THY FOOT FROM THE SABBATH, FROM DOING THY PLEASURE ON MY HOLY DAY ; AND CALL THE SABBATH A DELIGHT ; THE HOLY OF THE LORD, HONOURABLE ; AND SHALT HONOR HIM, NOT DOING THINE OWN WAYS, NOR FINDING THINE OWN PLEASURE, NOR SPEAKING THINE OWN WORDS : THEN SHALT THOU DELIGHT THYSELF IN THE LORD.—

THERE is no one commandment in the Law more frequently repeated, or more solemnly enjoined, than that of keeping the Sabbath-day holy : for it is prescribed, as the first part of the ceremonial law ; it is annexed to the judicial law ; and it is inserted in the body of the moral law, that it might be made the

standard of duty and service to the *household of faith*, in all succeeding ages. In other places of the Old Testament, the reverence due to the sanctuary, and the sanctification due to the Sabbath, are joined together. And in every place of the scripture, where it is mentioned, it is strictly commanded to be hallowed; and upon pain of the severest penalty, forbidden to be profaned.

If then so much stress is laid upon keeping this sacred day, and so much danger is incurred by neglecting it, it is natural to inquire, in what manner the duties of it are to be observed, that the sin of transgressing may be avoided. We know it is a day blessed to them, who keep it, as they ought; and that it was to this end hallowed, that it might bring a blessing. Nothing therefore was to be done, or suffered to be done, that would throw the least contempt upon the day; and every thing was to be done, or carefully

fully ordered to be done, that would put the greatest honor upon it.

IN these respects the Prophet Isaiah is very particular; and in the text, more especially, has pointed out, both negatively and positively, whatever we are to abstain from, and whatever we are bound to, lest, at any time, we allow ourselves or others, either to violate the holy rest, or to omit the holy work of that day.

If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, which is, in the scripture-language, not to trample upon its solemnities with contempt, or pass them over with indifference; but with caution and circumspection refrain from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, either by spending it in idleness, as some are used to do, or in intemperance, as others have presumed to do: if instead of this, thou call the Sabbath a delight; waiting with a religious impatience for its return, and not growing weary

/ weary of its restraints, or its duties, before it is past: if thou call it *the holy of the Lord, honourable*; forasmuch as it is dedicated to his immediate service, and cannot, without a horrid sacrilege in us, be alienated to any other purpose: call it holy to God, in devout thanksgivings for its mercies; call it honourable, because the very beauty of holiness is stamp'd upon it: *and shalt honor him*, who first instituted, and has ever since sanctified it to himself; for whatever regard is shewn to his day, is shewn to God: *not doing thine own ways*, as if there were no difference to be put between this, and a common day; *nor finding thine own pleasure*, as if it were lawful to pursue the same amusements, however innocent in themselves, as at other times: *nor speaking thine own words*, such, more especially, as may corrupt good manners: for the language of Heaven is the proper language for the Lord's day; religion is
 its

its business, and religious subjects its /-
native speech.

IF thou shalt thus remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy, *then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord*: for this shall be thy comfort; thou shalt have the glory, and thou shalt have the profit of it. Take pleasure in God's service, and the more abundant pleasure will arise from it. *I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth.* Them that honor him, He will honor; He will place them in security, and place them in dignity: for the way to be truly great is to be truly good. Finally, *I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father*: for the righteous soul shall be made fat with all the precious blessings of an earthly Canaan; and these shall be unto him the earnest of the heavenly. *The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it*: He has promised this joy and gladness to the pious worshippers of the God of Heaven, on the
day

day of his own appointment, and not one tittle of it shall fail.

IN the foregoing part of the chapter, the Prophet had enumerated the several duties of a religious fast, and the manifold blessings, that would attend the observance of it: comprehending under these the whole duty of man towards his neighbour, as the recital of Sabbath-sanctification is meant to include the whole of his duty towards God: so that the latter expresses, in one word, RELIGION; and the other, CHARITY.

THE particular branches of this also are affectingly specified. *Is not this the fast, that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness; which is, to undo whatever we have done amiss ourselves, and then to lighten the burdens, or compassionate the distresses of others.—Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry; and that*
thou

thou bring the poor, that are cast out, to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? What indeed are we born for, or for what has God more plentifully furnished us with abilities of mind, body, and estate above others, who are, by nature, our equals, but, that our abundance may be a supply for their wants, and that, what is thus given away in temporal goods may be paid us again in spiritual blessings? Thy righteousness, as the lips of truth have pronounced, shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rere-ward.

THESE are the two tables of the covenant, still subsisting between Heaven and Earth; the love of God, and the love of our neighbour, for God's sake. The love of God is shewn in keeping his Sabbaths; and the love of our neighbour is shewn

in acts of kindness to his body, and compassion to his soul.

WE can easily conceive, (may we never experience !) how alarming would be the confusion, how dreadful the consequences, which an abolition of the Sabbath would occasion. If men were left at large, without the stated return of a day, set apart for the public worship of God, upon one pretence or another, he would scarcely ever be worshipped at all. From ceasing to worship him, they would begin to forget him ; and from customarily forgetting him, they would go on to live, *as without him in the world*. But it is, *in effect*, abolished by those, who put no difference between this, and any other day, unless it be, as they will find nothing else to do, to distinguish it by a greater degree of *riot and excess*.

FATHER

FATHER of Mercies, *forgive them, for they know not what they do!* Many of the lower class, either through the poverty, or the carelessness of their parents, who have perhaps themselves been neglected before, have never been taught *what the will of the Lord is.* They know not the value of an immortal soul: nay, they scarcely know, in their years of childhood, that they have souls to be saved. From childhood they advance, in the same forlorn state of ignorance, to the days of their youth; with the seeds of corruption growing in their nature, and without a friendly hand, among their own relations, to root them up: insomuch, that when they arrive at the age of maturity, they will break out, free from the sense of remorse, into all that dissoluteness of life, and profligacy of manners, which is justly lamented, but too late to be redressed.

NEVERTHELESS, this might possibly have been prevented : and if any thing can contribute towards this good end, we must look for it from the happy institution of Sunday-Schools. For if we can once instil into young minds a veneration for God's holy day, *that* will beget an awful reverence for his holy name : and *that* again will produce an habitual regard to his holy laws.

OUR bowels of compassion forcibly yearn upon the spiritual infirmities of deserted infancy.—Is there any one, who has had the advantage of any education himself, so void of feeling for the welfare of his own offspring, as to leave them, without a guide, to wander, where they must be for ever lost, in the broad way, that leadeth to destruction ? And can we then unfeelingly divest ourselves of all concern for those helpless babes, who are straggling with a false guide, *when their fathers*

fathers and their mothers have forsaken them? They are still *our own flesh*, from which we cannot *hide ourselves*, without offence. And though men of little humanity, and less religion, may imagine, that their untutored souls are not quite so precious, as their own, in the sight of God; yet, let such men recollect, and it is but equitable they should, that if their Redeemer had set as low a price upon their souls, as they are apt to set upon the souls of others, only because their condition in life is inferior to their own, what must have become of them !

If the heart be more open to the impressions of such a charity, at any one time, more than at another, it will be at *this season*, when we commemorate the coming of the Son of God himself from Heaven, on purpose to save the souls, which ungrateful man is so prone to neglect.

THE

THE great inlet to every other vice, that depraves the mind, or corrupts the manners, is the habitual neglect, which has been shewn, by all ranks of men, to the sacred duties of the Sabbath. This has been confessed by the most abandoned, at a time, when the confession could answer no other purpose, than as a benevolent warning to the rising generation, lest they also *fall into the like condemnation*; even at the moments of horror and despair, which pass immediately before an ignominious death.

THE giddiness of youth is easily caught, when sinners lye in wait to entice them. The Sunday is a day of rest, and therefore they are more at leisure, than at any other time, to listen to their solicitations, and to comply with them. If, by constraint, they have attended at *the house of prayer*, they are tempted to run headlong from thence, when the restraint is over, to the house of
idleness

idleness ; where every good impression is immediately effaced, and every bad one substituted in its room. Here the wicked course begins, and oftentimes does not cease, whatever escapes it may experience by the way, till it is stopped by the hand of justice, and finished in the utter destruction of body and soul : in public disgrace, and endless misery.

Is it not worth our while, even in a national view, to seek out a remedy for this growing evil ? Is it not of the utmost importance, in a religious view, that we should try one ? If we can persuade our youth, at this dangerous age, to employ their time, and their thoughts properly on the vacant hours of the Sabbath-day, when they are most apt to sink into idleness of the worst kind, we may perhaps gain a point, which will save both body and soul from ruin. The institution, for which I am called upon to plead, has succeeded well

well in many places :—Why not in others ?
—Why not in this ? It is the best chance
they can have to be preserved from the
habits of sin ; and if this fail, they must
be undone.

I would therefore most earnestly re-
commend an attendance at these Schools,
not only to the parents, that they may en-
force it upon the minds of such children,
as can have no other opportunity of being
*brought up in the nurture and admonition of
the Lord* ; but I must press it, more espe-
cially, upon those youths themselves, who
are just setting out into the world, with
little knowledge of it, and no distrust ;
unguarded as they are, from their very
situation, against being led, it may be un-
advisedly, not by disposition, into a wrong
way. Let them not, through a false
shame, be kept back from beginning
that *instruction in righteousness*, which
will be the glory and comfort of their
old

old age. We have already seen, in several instances, the good improvement, that may be made in a short time: and great must be the satisfaction, which both parents and children must feel from a proper use of it.

WE would willingly hold out some little reward to encourage their perseverance in so hopeful a beginning. We wish to have that reward applied, in the most beneficial manner, in purchasing some necessary part of apparel, that they, who shew a good inclination, may attend these schools rather more decently, and more comfortably, than with what the parents are able to supply their children, unless assisted by the kind contribution of others.—As we are desirous of giving every assistance, that can be devised, to promote the success of these seminaries of religion and morals, we would gladly establish a separate fund for this purpose: but our

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present

present supplies are unhappily insufficient for so benevolent an undertaking: we are therefore tempted to solicit an enlargement of them*.

You cannot call in question the goodness of our design: you cannot deny, that the poor and needy children are proper objects of your charity: you cannot suspect any misapplication of it. Be persuaded then to *cast your mite into this treasury* of Heaven: the smallest will be accepted with thanksgiving. For this, the widow's piety is recorded in the Gospel, *for a memorial of her*: and for this, your names may be written in the book of life.

We mean not to importune unreasonably: we *know the readiness of your minds*, when the petitioner's plea is good: but we trust that this, now preferred to

* Since the collection at the Church-doors, which amounted to Thirty Pounds and upwards, the Committee have given a pair of shoes and stockings to every child in the several schools. In all, an hundred and sixty-four pairs of each.

you by the very dictates and feelings of humanity, is of itself more powerful, than all the motives, that can be urged in its behalf. Instead of repeating these which are many, and well known, I shall only add one reflection more, which I could wish to leave deeply imprinted in your hearts.

It was the devout and affectionate exclamation of an eminent divine of our church, in the last century, when he had just finished a course of most exemplary piety in the sacred function, “ Oh, what
 “ a glorious thing, how rich a prize, how
 “ well worth the expence of a man’s
 “ whole life were it, to be the author of
 “ saving any *one* soul *!—Judge of yourselves then, for it is not to be expressed, what, and how exquisitely joyous must be their feelings, who have been instrumental, jointly with others, in saving the souls of *thousands* !

* See Bishop *Fell’s* Life of Dr. *Hammond*.

THE greatest comfort we can have upon earth, is to make others comfortable : but it is beyond comparifon ftill greater, to become instrumental in increafing the happinefs of the bleffed ftate above : we fhall improve our own blifs and glory by reflecting, with a pious confcioufnefs, upon the means, we have ufed, of improving that of others : and we fhall enlarge the number of our companions in the heavenly joy, which, like its author, will never fade away.

THE END.

P R A Y E R S

FOR THE USE OF THE

SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

M O R N I N G P R A Y E R.

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this holy day, give us grace to improve it, as we ought, to the furtherance of thy glory, and the salvation of our own souls. We are placed in this School of Religion, by the charitable assistance of our friends, that we may be made capable of understanding thy blessed will, and trained up in the way of fulfilling it : incline our hearts, O God, to answer their pious designs;
and

and so faithfully to walk before Thee all the days of our youth, that in the more advanced parts of our lives we may not depart from it.

AND now, that we are preparing our minds for the solemn place of thy holy worship, we beseech Thee, let thy holy Spirit accompany us thither, that in all our thoughts, words, and actions, we may be devout, serious, and attentive, as becomes us in thy sacred presence. Open our hearts to receive thy holy word, when it is read to us, with all due thankfulness. Let us ever esteem it our happiness, to have a day of Rest set apart for these religious purposes : and let us accordingly employ it now, as we shall wish we had when we come to age. To this end, O Lord, imprint in our minds such a constant sense and fear of thy all-seeing eye, at all other times, as may preserve us from the evil habits of falsehood, swearing, and every other wicked practice, to which young minds especially, led on by bad companions, may be fatally enticed. Thus do we most heartily pray for thy blessing upon our own best endeavours, that we may grow in grace and goodness, as we grow in age ; and at last become
worthy

worthy to be admitted into the everlasting kingdom of our Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who has taught us always to sum up all our wants and petitions in his own most perfect form of prayer.

OUR Father, &c.

EVENING PRAYER.

O Most merciful and gracious Lord God, we return Thee our hearty thanks for the opportunities thou hast this day given us of appearing, with a becoming decency, in thy house of prayer, which is the gate of Heaven; and for the farther advantage of employing ourselves, more privately, in the proper business of the Sabbath-day, the care of our immortal souls. Sanctify to us, we most humbly beseech Thee, all those means of Grace, which, by thy heavenly bounty, and the benevolent assistance of others, we have this day been partakers of. Help us, by the continual aid of thy holy Spirit, in the week following, to live according to our prayers and promises, according to the instructions and exhortations

exhortations, which we have received from thy holy word; that it may abide in our hearts, and bring forth the fruits of a religious life. Grant us grace, by such a deep impression of it upon our hearts, to withstand every temptation to evil during the remainder of this sacred day, which has been hitherto happily dedicated to thy service; that we may learn to sanctify it, as we ought, throughout; and make every return of this blessed time more and more serviceable to our improvement in knowledge, our advancement in holiness, and our progress to those heavenly mansions, where, when we shall cease to serve and worship Thee here on earth, we may join with the pious souls of thy departed servants in celebrating an eternal Sabbath, in praises and thanksgivings to Thee, the God of all; to Jesus Christ, our gracious Redeemer; and to the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth us; whom we pray to bless, preserve, and keep us, for ever and ever, *Amen.*

OUR Father, &c.



F I N I S.

